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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.





THE
CORSAIR;
A ROMANTIC LEGEND OF HELL GATE,
ILLUSTRATING
THE BEAUTY OF INNOCENCE.

Date of the action: Midsummer, 1627.

Author Unknown, and now First Edited.

With a Historical Sketch of the Strait from the Earliest Times.



NEW YORK:
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PREFACE.

AS we have invited the reader to a long Poem, we feel some misgiving in setting before him a lengthy Preface. We will therefore bring to his attention, as an Appendix, the matter intended as an Introduction, thus leaving him free to begin with the Story of the **CORSAIR** at once, while the former may afterward be read with advantage, should he feel interested in the facts and history of the locality of which it treats. He will also find therein some particulars relating to the leading characters described in the Story. There he will also learn why the Pirate's daughter became so impressed with fear as the vessel approached the turbulent Strait, whose name, even now, is suggestive of wreck and disaster.

PRELUDE.

THIS story of the sea,
Full of weird mystery,
Twere vain to tell to thee
'Mid dusty lore I found it !
You still might doubt its truth,—
The truest tale, in sooth,
(Such as Boaz and Ruth)
Has gathered skeptics round it !

Yet, should you deign to read
Where'er the Muse may lead,
The tale, as you proceed,
Will wake some tender feeling,
Till, like a pleasant dream,
The Corsair's MAID will seem
To throw a hallowed beam
Where phantom-shades were stealing !

THE CORSAIR.

Nor florid prose,
Nor honied lies of rhyme,
Can blazon evil deeds,
Or consecrate a crime.

—CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE.

The whirligig of Time
Brings in his revenges.

—SHAKESPEARE.

TIS said, in ancient times,
Cursed with a thousand crimes,
Blood-stained in all the climes,
Sailed hither a Pirate ;—
Flax'n was his flowing hair,
Rake-like his haughty air,
Eyes that revealed despair,
His passions fierce and irate.

Sprung from the Vikings bold,—
Sea-kings they were of old
Who held their warlike hold
 On Norway's stormy shore,—
He made the sea his home,
And hoped, where he might roam,
The waves would be his tomb
 When he should be no more!

His Norman castle lost,
His fate by battle crossed,
His life like ship a-tossed,
 The raging seas pursuing,
He reared a stronger hold,
Afar from winter's cold,
And filled its cells with gold
 From many a ship subduing.

He'd sailed o'er tropic seas ;
'Mong sun-bright Cyclades ;
Before the gelid breeze,
 And gales Siberian ;—
Upon the Spanish Main
Captives many he had slain,
Blood running there like rain
 From veins Iberian !

Thrice, when o'ermatched in fight,
He sailed through Hell Gate, light

As sea-mew out of sight
Through tempest-clouds careering,
While ships for war arrayed,
The treach'rous rocks delayed,
Or there forever staid—
To Pluto's realms steering !

Once, sweeping o'er the Sound,
Amid the dark profound,
These fateful words resound—
“ A foe!—*They* must defend her!”
While a frigate on their course
Hailed them in stormy Norse,
Shrill, clear and free, then hoarse,
Demanding their surrender !

Laden with golden store,
The Pirate sunk in shore
A thousand bars or more
Before he joined in battle :
Then roared his guns amain,
Then poured his iron rain.
Till groaned the decks with slain,
Mid spars' and cables' rattle.

Down went the Norseman brave,
Down to his sea-green grave,
No more to be a slave

Where the dark norns* bewilder !—
Athwart the morning skies
The wheeling sea-bird flies
And mocks the coral's rise,
Old Neptune's silent builder.

The Pirate's buried gold
Sands of the Sound still hold,
Nor wizard's wand has told
The place of its concealing ;
Yet, ere the Corsair died,
He sought these waters wide
More spoil, perhaps, to hide,
Or this, perchance, revealing

Ere Fortune frowned again,
That oft had brought him pain,
Instead of golden gain,
The only thing he cherished,
Save her he wed of yore,
Save the bright child she bore,
His blue-eyed Leonore—
For these he would have perished !

But ere he spread his sail,
To catch the westward gale,

* In Scandinavian mythology, the three fates, *past, present, and future.*

His vassals, growing pale,
Sighed at the words then spoken ;—
Hushed was the wassail all
Within the castle hall,
And shadows on the wall
Grew phantom-like and broken.

For, o'er the Corsair grim,
There came a wayward whim
That hither should sail with him
His daughter Leonore,
Who, bright and beautiful,
Was always dutiful,
With pride not yet too full
She left her island shore.

Her father's castle there
Soon fades, a speck in air,
With banners floating fair
From loop and turret, waning.
Then on the deck—alone—
She knelt to Nature's Throne,
Whose God rules there--unknown—
The mighty billows chaining.

Unknown her father's trade,
Unseen his reeking blade,
Not yet had that sweet maid
Found he was cruel-hearted ;

For, guarded in her home,
Whene'er his ship did come,
She, not allowed to roam,
Ne'er from her mother parted.

Few were the tears she shed,
As o'er the waves she sped,
Without one hope ahead
To cheer the loved behind her !
And though too brave to fear,
She sighed to leave those dear
For skies less bright and clear,
Faint filial love to bind her ;

For, 'mid his reveling band,
Her father held in hand.
And poured, while he could stand,
The purple grapes' libation,
Till quite forgot was she,
Whose eyes, he said, should be
The light of every sea,
The pride of queenly station !

Soon—when his ship was light—
He met in tropic night
A foe, with armor bright,
Off the Azores :
Up went the Pirate's flag—

Black, as round Pico's crag*
The infant storm-clouds lag
Before they sweep the shores.

Far o'er the waters threw
The moon her amber hue,
As swift the foeman's crew
Their guns unlimbered ;—
Then, as when thunders roar,
Their broadsides they did pour,
Which did the pirate gore,
Though heavily timbered.

Undaunted on his track,
The Corsair would not slack
While pouring fire back
From every gun's embrasure.—
For, once his crew aboard,
The conflict, sword to sword,
Had made the Pirate lord
Of ship and golden treasure.

Unequal grew the fight,—
The pirate's guns, too light,
The Dutchman could not “bite”—
Van Tromp, the Admiral!

* Pico is a very high mountain on one of the Azores, from which the island derives its name.

Who loved these tropic shores,
Where Night her starlight pours,
And heard from the Azores
Love's sweetest madrigal.*

Then mid that dreadful fray
Fair Leonore did pray—
“ Oh, father, do not stay,
Or we shall all be slaughtered!—
I dreamt but yesternight
A frigate hove in sight
With men, in armor bright,
Who ne'er midst carnage loitered! ”

“ Nay—daughter, do not fear!—
The Dutch we'll conquer here!—
Ho, men! make ready—clear
The foeman's decks, undaunted! ”
But ere his men could test
Their foemen, breast to breast,
The wind veered to the west,
As if the seas were haunted!

Far o'er the sultry main
There rose a hurricane,
Black, as was Chaos' reign
Before the earth was lighted;—

* It is said that the inhabitants of the Azores are much addicted to gallantry.

The heavens seemed roll
Together like a scroll,
As flashed from pole to pole
The spirit long benighted !

Out of the tempest's gloom—
As from unhallowed tomb—
A raven on the boom
Fluttered above the Pirate !—
The croaking of the bird
The crew in terror heard—
“Death !” was the fearful word
It uttered, wild and irate !

Wide grew their vacant stare—
More grim their dumb despair—
As thunder-bursts in air
Came pealing—booming—crashing !
While, like red meteors' blaze,
The lightning's lurid rays
Lit spars and sails and stays
With never-ceasing flashing !

Oh, the wild hurricane !
Thou terror of the main !
What victims thou hast slain,
The fairest tropic scourging !
Though in thy maddest mood,
Thou did'st the Corsair good,

Else had his crew been food,
Beneath the green waves' surging !

So quick the tempest came—
With thunder and with flame—
The Dutchman's fire was tame
From which the pirate parted !

Then o'er the angry sea,
As strove each ship to be
Well braced toward the lee,
They, through the storm-clouds, darted !

Long was that famous chase—
The hurricane's embrace
Long lines of foam did trace
As fast they sped to leeward :
The pirate, swift of wing,
Flew, like a bird in spring,
Away from the storm-king,
Sweeping from seaward,

Till, like a mighty ghost,
A headland on the coast,
Grim as a sullen host
In battle late defeated,
Rose like a tower of stone—
As pale the moonbeams shone—
And then in darkness—gone—
Like host that had retreated !

“ Oh, father ! ” cried the maid,
Like one of ghosts afraid,
“ What is that dreadful shade
That looms before us ? ”

“ ’Tis but the land, my girl,
That bends in graceful whorl,
And soon ’twill shine like pearl,
When bright the sun beams o’er us ! ”

With fortune now more kind,
They sped before the wind
Six days—the Dutch behind
Growling like thunder,
Before their path was seen
To glow with light between
The isles that lay serene
In all their tropic wonder.

Then came more dreary days,—
Dull—dark—with misty rays
A moment in a blaze,
And then in darkness ending !—
At last fair Leonore,
Longing to tread the shore,
Cried—“ Will we nevermore
Escape this gloom impending ?

“ I know—oh—father dear,
Some dread mishap is near—

A third night, dark and drear,
The scowling Dutch behind us ! ”
“ Nay, daughter ;—soon the Sound
We'll reach, 'mid isles around ;—
I know each pass profound,—
No Dutchman there can find us !

“ Yes—ere that fair expanse
The foe can win—perchance,
Old Nick himself may dance
Upon his quarter-railing !—
Through Hell Gate's narrow way
His ship will go astray,
Till gored, like ship of clay,
She ends her days of sailing ! ”

Another night—“ Heigh-ho ! ”
The reef-foam gleamed like snow,—
Old Coney's serf below,
The Narrows stretched before them—
With Staten on their left,
And Bedloe's, far bereft,
And Governor's, as cleft
From Brooklyn, frowning o'er them.

“ I pray thee, father, tell
Why doth that doleful bell
Sound so much like a knell,
So near this gloomy water ? ”

“ ‘Tis nought, my Leonore,
But watchmen on the shore,
Who toll, while burghers snore,
To fright the Fiend of Slaughter !

“ For here the Indian roves
Through islands’ darkling groves,
And those he hates he loves
To wing his arrows through them ;
For they are robbers come
To steal away his home ;
Tribe after tribe must roam,
And e’en in trade they ‘do’ them !” *

Past Wallabout’s cosy nook,
And stormy Corlear’s Hook,
Which many a storied book
Involves in truth and fable,—
Past Blackwell’s wooded shore,
Where turbid waters pour,
Dark, sullen evermore,
Ignoring man or cable ;—

* That usually reliable, though sometimes facetious historian, Diedrich Knickerbocker, informs us that Dutch traders, bartering for furs among the Indians, two or three centuries ago, were wont to tell them that a Dutchman’s foot invariably *weighed a pound*, thus taking in the red man’s peltry—and the Indian into the bargain !

Past these the pirate's sail
Swell wide before the gale,
Which, like a demon's wail,
 Sighs through the cordage, shrilling.

“ Oh, father ! ” cries the maid,
“ If blood be on your blade,
Pray now to Heaven for aid
 While Heaven yet is willing !

“ The stormy petrels fly
Along the waves more nigh—
Then wheel athwart the sky,
 Heralds of storm impending !
Nearer the lightnings flash—
Nearer the thunders crash—
Louder the waters lash
 These baleful shores, unending !

“ Behold those racking clouds !
List to the shivering shrouds !
Lo ! spirits come in crowds
 From yonder lurid shore !
Oh, father ! bend thy knee
Before that fiery sea
Sweeps over thee and me,—
 Lost—lost—forevermore ! ”

“ Hush—daughter ! —Do not think
Your father fears to sink

Who's stood on Death's dark brink
In many a furious fray!—
Our castle by the sea
Is Heaven's shrine to me,
Where *one* on bended knee
This night for us will pray!"

"Oh, father! List!—I hear
Swift rapids roaring near;—
Oh, what is it I fear
So close our promised haven?"

"'Tis nought, my Leonore,
But waters 'long the shore,
That through dark Hell Gate pour,
Clamorous as a raven!"

"Then, turn, my father, back,—
I hear the vessel crack,—
I dread those waters black,
Hot as the lightning o'er us!"

"Nay—daughter—fear no harm,—
Their tides are not more warm
Than springs upon a farm,—
No danger lurks before us!"

Through Hell Gate's narrow pass
He steered his ship, alas!
A ship no more than glass
In that fierce current!—

Among the ragged rocks,
With many thundering shocks,
The blood-stained cruiser blocks
 The deep, Plutonian torrent !

His daughter Leonore
Alone did reach the shore,
The rest were nevermore
 Beheld on this bright planet !—
For them no more shall blow
The winds where spices grow,—
Their flag trails down below
 Where breeze shall never fan it !

Their eyes have turned to stone,
That oft in battle shone ;—
Their hair to sea-kelp grown,
 'Neath wind and wave's commotion,
Shall stream no more to breeze
Across the Arctic seas,
Or blue Symplegades
 Damp with the spray of ocean.

The Pirate's daughter lay
On yonder rock till day,
When from the Lower Bay
 Sailed hither a cruiser,
On which a young King came,
Whose heart was set aflame

(Which no fond maid will blame)
While trying to amuse her !

On board the royal craft,
The maiden wept and laughed,
By turns, like one that's daft,
With grief and joy o'erweighted ;
While (always at her side)
The kingly sailor's pride
Grew fainter, till it died,
In Beauty's glory fated !—

Fair islands of the sea
Were his—as she must be—
He said, in playful glee,
And threw a necklace o'er her !
Then on his noble breast
She laid her head to rest,
Though half afraid to test
The golden dream before her !

No woman's heart will deign
To question more,—'twere vain ;—
The lands of Deloraine
Were hers forevermore !
And there the orange grew,
And buds of fragrance blew,
And birds of brightness flew,
And loved was Leonore !

And there—worth all the rest—
Her children—loved—caressed—
Imbibed their mother's quest
 To bless and be a blessing ;—
And so she reigned in them
Till Life became a gem
(More prized than diadem),
 Loved more for Love's caressing !

In all her life there came
But one dark fate—the same
That gave her name to Fame,
 Her father to the torrent,
Where lie grim wrecks of Hope—
And skeletons darkly grope
'Mong ships without a rope
 Beneath the surging current !

Thus, Innocence alone
Survived—to reach a throne ;
Her crown, the richest stone
 That e'er with gold was blended !—
Long has her virtuous sway,
Like sunshine, passed away—
And so I pause to say,
 The Corsair's tale is ended !

APPENDIX.

1627—1885.

LEGENDARY—HISTORICAL—STATISTICAL.

HELL Gate, the scene of the tragedy described in the foregoing pages, is not now what it was in former times. Its turbulent character has been modified to such a degree that it has already lost half its terrors. The mariner now, by skillful piloting, can avoid its dangers and bring his ship safely from the jaws of this modern Charybdis. Not so in days remote,—its numerous rocks, islands, shelves and whirlpools rendering it terrible to the most skillful pilot at certain times of tide. This long-desired change has been brought about by the Government, which has expended millions of dollars in making this narrow strait leading to the Sound less dangerous to the navigator. Though it has been the scene of numerons tragedies, its history is not altogether uninteresting—and first, as regards its name. There having been considerable controversy, in times past, as to its correct orthography, we have taken some trouble to investigate the matter. Some writers have insisted that it should be spelt *Hurl* Gate. Ancient records, however, do not bear them out in this respect. The map in Van der Donck's History, published in 1656; Ogilvie's History of America, 1671, and also a journal written in the sixteenth century, found in Hazard's State Papers, give the name as printed in the Poem. Besides these ancient and trustworthy authorities, there is a

venerable essay in French, which, speaking of various changes made in names about New York, observes—
“*De Helle-gat, trou d’Enfer, ils ont fait Hell-Gate, Porte d’Enfer.*”

For aught we know the heroine of this strange legend, which the author has sought to illustrate in verse, may have read the above passage in French;—if so, her childish fear, after her father had spoken of their close proximity to the fatal strait, was no more intense than we can readily understand, when we take into account the superstitious age in which the actors lived.

The perching of a raven upon the boom of the vessel, off the Azores, contributed also to impress the Pirate’s daughter with evil forebodings. Nor could she escape observing the consternation of the sailors who beheld it fluttering over her father’s head, and overheard its dreadful prophecy. This bird, as is well known, is exceedingly intelligent, and can be taught to articulate words. It lives to a great age, a hundred years or more, and from remote periods of history has been connected with various popular superstitions. The Bible gives the first historical notice of this species. We are told that at the end of forty days, after the great flood had covered the earth, Noah, wishing to ascertain whether or no the waters had abated, sent forth a raven, which did not return into the ark. When Elijah provoked the enmity of Ahab, by prophesying against him, and hid himself by the Brook Cherith, the ravens were appointed by Heaven to bring him his daily food. Though thus honored, this bird seems in all ages to have been considered ominous of evil, and, in the days of auguries and divination, like the Banshee of the Irish, was thought to possess the power of foretelling future events—especially such as were dark, gloomy, and foreboding.

Perhaps no bird is more widely distributed over the

surface of the globe. A British writer says, it ‘croaks as gravely as with ourselves on the shores of the Black and Caspian Seas, visits our Indian metropolis of Calcutta, forces it way over the guarded shores of Japan, dwells among our busy descendants of America, ranges from Mount Etna to the Iceland cold of Hecla, and braves the rigor of the Arctic regions as far as Melville’s Island.’” Dr. Richardson says that “it frequents the Barren Grounds of the most intense winter cold, its movements being directed in a great measure by those of the herds of reindeer, musk-oxen, and bisons, which it follows, ready to assist in devouring such as are killed by beasts of prey or by accident.” Captain Ross speaks of it as “one of the few birds capable of braving the severity of an Arctic winter.”

Although we have the pestering crow, with its unvarying “*Caw, caw, caw!*” almost everywhere in our Eastern States, the raven is rarely seen there, yet it is common in the West, and thence northward to the Fur Countries. In this State it has its favorite haunts, one of which is the region about Niagara Falls. Here, mingling its croakings with the roar of waters, it seems still more solemn and mysterious than elsewhere. Here one might read Poe’s “Raven,” which, by its spectral images, produces a striking effect on the imagination, and feel the force of the poet’s language as in no other locality :—

“Open here I flung my shutter,
When, with many a flirt and flutter,
In there stepp’d a stately raven
 Of the saintly days of yore :
Not the least obeisance made he,
Not an instant stopp’d or staid he,
But, with mein of lord or lady,
 Perched above my chamber door—
Perched upon a bust of Pallas,

Just above my chamber door ;
Perched and sat, and nothing more.

“ Then this ebon bird beguiling
My sad fancy into smiling,
By the grim and stern decorum
Of the countenance it wore :
‘ Though thy crest be shorn and shaven,
Thou’—I said—‘ art sure no craven,
Ghastly, grim, and ancient raven,
Wandering from the nightly shore—
Tell me what thy lordly name is,
On the night’s Plutonian shore ?’—
Quoth the raven, ‘ Nevermore !’”

* * * *

“ ‘ Be that word our sign of parting,
Bird or fiend,’ I shrieked upstarting :
‘ Get thee back into the tempest,
And the night’s Plutonian shore !
Leave no black plume as a token
Of that lie thy soul hath spoken—
Leave my loneliness unbroken,
Quit the bust above my door;
Take thy beak from out my heart,
And take thy form from off my door’—
Quoth the raven, ‘ Nevermore !’”

Sailors, it is well known, are very superstitious in regard to birds alighting on their vessels. On such occasions they call them devil’s birds, witches, etc. The appearance of stormy petrels at sea has been supposed to portend rough weather, and they are therefore not welcome visitors to sailors. These birds seem to delight in storm and tempest, now sweeping down into the trough of the sea, and now soaring high up among the clouds, and wheeling athwart them, as if enjoying a frolic. They are said to haunt the whole Atlantic seaboard. Their habit of paddling along the surface of the water obtained for them the name of petrel, from the Apostle Peter, who walked upon the water. It is probably to the birds of

this species—the fearless riders of the tempest—that Brainard refers in his song of “The Sea-Bird” :—

“ On the deep is the mariner’s danger,
On the deep is the mariner’s death ;
Who, to fear of the tempest a stranger,
Sees the last bubble burst of his breast ?

‘Tis the sea-bird, sea-bird, sea-bird,
Lone looker on despair ;
The sea-bird, sea-bird, sea-bird,
The only witness there !

“ Who hovers on high o’er the lover,
And her who has clung to his neck ?
Whose wing is the wing that can cover
With its shadow the foundering wreck ?
‘Tis the sea-bird, etc.

“ My eye in the light of the billow,
My wing in the wake of the wave ;
I shall take to my breast for a pillow
The shroud of the fair and the brave !
I’m the sea-bird, etc.

“ My foot on the iceberg has lighted
When hoarse the wild winds veer about ;
My eye, when the bark is benighted,
Sees the lamp in the light-house go out !
I’m the sea-bird, sea-bird, sea-bird,
Lone looker on despair ;
The sea-bird, sea-bird, sea-bird,
The only witness there !”

One word as to the Corsair’s nationality : Though not a historical fact, the legend, meagre as it is, is explicit enough in regard to his having been originally one of those bold Northmen who roamed the seas in the sixteenth century, though at the opening of the foregoing story he had his stronghold in some more salubrious climate than the North, probably on one of the Grecian Isles. But his early years were doubtless spent in quest of adventure in his native Norway seas. As in ages past, so even now the Norwegian youth who lives near

the coast, takes to the sea, though in legitimate pursuits, as naturally as his Berserker ancestors. The Vikings of Norway were the boldest of all ancient mariners of a piratical character. They looked upon the sea as their home;—the tempest was their delight. The ship to them was as a living thing;—they guided it with a spirit as exulting and confident as a rider does his steed. “Blow where thou wilt, O wind,” they cried, “whithersoever thou takest us, the land is ours!”

As regards the obstructions in Hell Gate, we have gathered a few facts which may interest the reader. Though the sources are various, their authenticity may be relied on. The East River, of which Hell Gate forms a part, receives the tide at its two extremities; at the eastern extremity, the Sound tide; at the western, the Sandy Hook tide. The times as well as the heights of these tides are different. To make it still more difficult for the mariner, there are three channels existing at this historic place; that is, between the north point of Blackwell's Island and Negro Point on Ward's Island. The eastern channel is six hundred feet wide, and lies between the Astoria shore and the middle reef, parts of which were formerly known as the Indian Flood Rock, Chickens, and Negro Head; then we have the middle channel, between the middle reef and the reef containing Great and Little Mill Rocks, and finally the main ship channel, between the last reef and the New York shore. Formerly, vessels bound eastward on the flood, taking the eastern channel, in the endeavor to get around the reef at Hallet's Point, ran the risk of being carried upon the Frying Pan, near Ward's Island, while vessels bound westward on the ebb, were thrown so much off by the reef at Hallet's Point as to be endangered by the set of the tide directly upon the middle reef. It was obvious, therefore, that the reef at Hallet's Point and the middle

reef constituted the chief obstacles to the safe passage of ships and other craft.

Besides these great barriers, many smaller rocks contributed to increase the dangers awaiting the hapless mariner who boldly sought the waters of the Sound at unpropitious times of tide and weather. More dangerous because hidden, we give the names of a few of these formidable obstructions: Pot Rock, situated in mid channel between Ward's Island and the Astoria shore, was a pyramidal rock, the depth over it being about eighteen feet. Frying Pan had a depth of nine feet over it. Way's Reef and Shelldrake, situated in Pot Cove, had depths of water of five and eight feet respectively. In the main channel there were two great obstructions—the Heel Tap Rocks, north of Great Mill Rock, and Rylander Reef, on the New York shore, near 92d street.

Old Dutch chronicles inform us that the unwieldy vessels from the fatherland were sometimes drawn into the vortex of that tremendous whirlpool called the Pot, where they were whirled about in giddy mazes until the senses of their commanders and crews were overpowered by the horror of the scene, and the strangeness of the revolution.

Certain it is, that to the horrific accounts of Dutch navigators may be traced some of the various traditions handed down of this marvellous Strait. It is also true that these ancient mariners gave this pass the name of *Helle-gat*, or as it has been interpreted, Hell Gate.

For nearly half a century men have been blasting away at the jagged reefs which jut out into the narrow channels which connect Long Island Sound with the Bay of New York. For centuries ships have struck on these same rocks. The average, in years lately passed, has been nearly one vessel a week. Though many of the obstructions were cleared out by the great explosion, planned and executed by Gen. John Newton, U.S.A.,

some ten years ago, yet the dangerous character of the strait remained. At last, the Government decided to tunnel underneath the middle reef (Flood Rock)—and at one tremendous explosion blow everything skyward. For nearly a decade men worked night and day to accomplish that end. The quantity of dynamite and powder used in charging the mine is said to have been 275,000 pounds.

Great Mill Rock, lying midway in Hell Gate, almost opposite the island-reef that has just been doomed to destruction, is supposed to have been the Rock on which the Corsair's daughter was thrown when her father's ship went down. The writer of these pages once knew a lady who, in her youth, lived with her parents on this same island, her father at that time being in the employ of the Government. This lady always seemed delighted when telling any one how she had often carried convicts, who had escaped from the prisons on Blackwell's Island, in her skiff to the main-land. Of course, such little frolics happened when she was young, romantic, and—sympathetic. To make these feats of bravery appear more daring, they were accomplished late at night.

There were nearly four miles of tunneling under Flood Rock, or about 21,670 feet. The longest galleries were four blocks in length, or 1,200 feet. If these galleries had been in a straight line their distance would have been equal to a walk from the Battery to Forty-second street. Twenty-four galleries or tunnels were run from north to south, which were intersected by forty-six others, running nearly east and west. The tunnels were on an average ten feet from floor to ceiling and six or eight feet wide. The rock taken from them measured 80,000 cubic yards. There were 467 huge pillars supporting the roof. All through these galleries and corridors workmen had bored holes nine feet deep and three inches in diameter.

The columns were also honey-combed with holes. There were 13,286 of such holes, which were filled with dynamite and powder cartridges. The chief engineer had only to touch an electric button to explode all this destructive compound. Had one of those unpleasant looking cartridges fallen from the hand of a workman upon the rocky floor, and exploded, it would have ignited all the rest, and thus caused a terrible disaster. Each cartridge weighed about six pounds. They resembled rolling-pins in size, and were delivered at Flood Rock by a tug-boat. They were received in square boxes, and, if they had been placed in a line, they would have reached twenty-two miles. The previous explosion at Hell Gate, directed by the same engineer, was effected with 50,000 pounds of rack-a-rock. During the charging of the mine at that time the workmen dropped three cartridges. We have heard of but one having been dropped at Flood Rock. Of course the greatest precaution was exercised to prevent a catastrophe. Twenty picked miners had charge of placing the cartridges in position. An elevator ran up and down the shaft bringing explosives to the men below. The cartridges were hoisted on cars and trundled away by mule power to the different corridors.

There was a weird, strange fascination about those dimly-lighted caverns, and the visitor often stopped to admire the marvellous effect of light on the great blocks of crystal quartz over which the clear water rippled in brightness and splendor. A wooden bridge spanned a deep ditch, which was so accurately laid out that it collected nearly all the water that found its way into the tunnels. The pumps disposed of this at the rate of 40,000 gallons per hour. The late explosion, it is asserted by those familiar with the subject, was the greatest ever known in the world. Now that the nine or ten acres of rock and island are blown up, dredging machines

will clear the channel, and dump the stone into almost bottomless holes in the neighborhood. The mixing of such an immense quantity of powder so near the city was done on Little Mill Rock Island, under the careful supervision of Lieutenant Derby. The compound was mixed in a lead-lined tank by men who used wooden hoes. It was then poked from a trough into copper cylinders two and a half inches in diameter and two feet long, and pressed down solid with wooden rammers. Each cylinder when full was soldered so as to make it water-tight.

When compared to the great operations that have just terminated, those of the past seem like child's play. Maillefort's process of discharging cans filled with gunpowder was only useful in removing projecting points of rock. It was entirely inadequate to cope with flat areas of rock, and after three years—1851, 1852, and 1853—operations were suspended, with no great results, while the hungry reefs and boiling floods claimed their victims as before.

Though this work has cost much treasure, never was money better spent. The scene of this great undertaking lies in the collection district of New York, the nearest port of entry. The amount of revenue collected during the year 1884, was, in round numbers, over \$135,000,000. The amount of commerce and navigation that will be benefitted by the completion of this work daily is estimated at millions of dollars.

The cry—so familiar to those who ply the waters of the Sound—"Look out for breakers!" will resound in this often-fatal locality no more—and Flood Rock, with all its obstructions, it is hoped, has disappeared forever beneath the green tide that swells through this once-turbulent Strait.



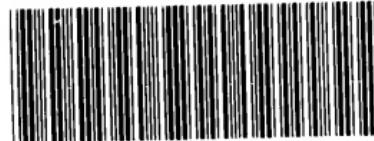
A SOUVENIR
OF THE
GREAT EXPLOSION.
WITH A

*Historical Sketch of the Famous Strait
during the last 250 Years.*





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